

## Testimony of Danielle Singleton Supporting

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### SB487 An Act Establishing the Infant and Toddler Early Care & Family Support Initiative

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Senator Fon-fara, Representative Scanlan, and members of the Finance Committee, my name is Danielle Singleton and I am the Coordinator of Special Education for the Consolidated School District of New Britain. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 487. This bill would redirect existing tax revenue from the budget reserve to a new non lapsing Early Care and Family Support account. Funds in this account would then be used to contract with child care providers to increase the supply of high quality infant toddler care. Priority would be given to child care providers in lower income child care locations.

There are many reasons why this bill is important for children and families living in cities like New Britain, where the median household income is \$45,990. We have to remember that some families are living above that median income, but some are also living below it. While many families would like to provide their infants and toddlers with exposure to other children, trained professionals, increased language models and opportunities for social and emotional development, limited income can be a substantial barrier to that dream. Families struggling financially to provide essentials for living often have to forgo assistance with infant and toddler care that would otherwise give their children a strong foundation for learning. Another barrier is the shortage of accredited child care facilities in large cities like New Britain. This results in fewer slot availability than actual need.

“The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* requires that early intervention services be provided, to the maximum extent appropriate, in natural environments for infants and toddlers. The natural environment includes home and community settings where children would be participating if they did not have a disability.” (Office of Special Education Programs - OSEP). One problem we run into is that first time parents, or often young parents, without knowledge about what is and is not developmentally appropriate for their youngsters, can miss signs of delays or disabilities. When this happens, the opportunity for providing early intervention services can be missed. The thing about early intervention services is that once that window is missed, we can’t go back in time to retrieve it. It’s simply missed. When children enroll in school for Kindergarten and that’s the first time educators are identifying a developmental delay or disability, we recommend services and assist the family and child. Despite this, research shows that the earlier we intervene to provide

support for children, the better their outcomes. By increasing access to infant and toddler care, we also increase the opportunity for identifying delays and offering early intervention services to children. There are more trained eyes on them, assuring that they get what they need at the earliest possible opportunity.

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Through our District Preschool Assessment teams, we evaluate an average of 200 children, between the ages of 2 and a half and 4 years old, per year. In addition to Birth to 3 referrals for evaluation, our district receives anywhere from 80 to 95 community referrals. These are children referred for evaluation by pediatricians, parents, and child care centers. Most of the children referred, are qualifying for services. Children at that young age are entering our Preschool programs with significant needs. Many children are demonstrating social and emotional delays and difficulties. The prevalence of this increased as a result of the pandemic, after children were quarantined for a period of time and ALL children missed out on important interactive opportunities. If anything, the pandemic showed us just how important childcare and school experiences are for the healthy development of our children.

It's our responsibility to make sure that we are providing equitable access to experiences that contribute to the well being and development of our youngest citizens. When delays and disabilities are identified, we need to assure that children are receiving early intervention services and supports for the best outcomes possible. SB-487 will provide the resources necessary for ensuring this occurs. Thank you for your time this afternoon and I urge you to pass this bill on behalf of the children and families of New Britain and Connecticut.

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